

Learning from a fool: Searching for the 'unmanaged' context for radical learning

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Abstract

Drawing on the existing theorizing of organizational learning from a radical perspective, this article attempts to problematize such notion of learning and position it within the existing organizational contexts informed by divergent types of rationality. The study scrutinizes these frameworks with a view to reflect on the potentiality for radical learning to occur within them. In this vein, the conceptual analysis of non-technical and non-marginal notions, namely, 'spirituality', 'luck' and 'wisdom', in different modes of rationality is conducted. This article demonstrates that since the conceptual inclusiveness is entailed by the specificity of sensemaking mechanisms, which these modes employ, the analysed notions can be approached as their litmus paper. The functionalist rationality types are found to be incommensurate with exigencies of the radical context for learning. In pursue of the conducive area for radical learning, the notions of unmanaged organization and the technology of foolishness provide the theoretical frame for the study, and their joint sensemaking context is discussed using examples. This unmanaged space driven by inclusive foolishness is recognized as one that enables the liminal sensemaking processes conducive for radical learning to occur.

Keywords

Conceptual analysis, emancipatory rationality, liminality, radical learning, technology of foolishness, unmanaged organization

Introduction

This study is an attempt to explore the organizational context for radical learning associated with the emancipatory (Habermas, 1971), process-oriented and non-essentialist perspective (Clegg et al., 2005). The conceptual analysis is hinged upon the notions of 'luck', 'spirituality' and 'wisdom' and employed across the Habermasian spectrum of rationalities. Using the recent, and not-so-recent, developments in organization studies – Gabriel's (1995) notion of the unmanaged organization and March's (1976) technology of foolishness – as a theoretical framework, this article inquires into different organizing modes and scrutinizes their sensemaking strategies. A potentially suitable liminal terrain informed by emancipatory rationality is explored as a space for an emergence of radical learning. Thus, the contribution of this article is threefold: (1) offering a new reading of the notion of radical learning, which is nevertheless informed by existing theories; (2) identifying organizational frameworks and existing conditions that preclude such learning and (3) delineating the organizational sensemaking context conducive to radical learning. The study will start with introducing, positioning and problematizing the notion of radical learning. Subsequently, the three Habermasian modes of rationality that inform this study's approach to learning will be introduced, and a brief explanation of conceptual analysis method will be offered. Finally, the existing organizational frameworks will be scrutinized with a view to reflect on the potentiality for radical learning to occur within them. In this vein, the conceptual analysis of nontechnical and non-marginal

notions, namely, 'spirituality', 'luck' and 'wisdom', in different modes of rationality, will be conducted. It will be demonstrated that since the conceptual inclusiveness is entailed by the specificity of the sensemaking mechanisms, which these modes employ, the analysed notions can be approached as their litmus paper. Subsequently, the notions of unmanaged organization and technology of foolishness will provide the theoretical frame for the study, and their joint sensemaking context will be discussed with examples. An attempt to delineate the dynamics and theorize the emerging 'foolishly-unmanaged' organizational context will lead to proposing a space conducive to radical learning. Within such an unmanaged space for radical learning, foolishness may become an organizing (but not 'ordering') principle and a playful 'trying things out' – a mode of acting.

Area of inquiry

The approach in which learning is associated with changes in the cognitive structures of an individual (Shuell, 1986: 413) and which searches for knowledge 'out there' is often subjected to critical scrutiny (Gherardi et al., 1998; Van Der Sluis and Poell, 2002). It is becoming increasingly evident that knowledge must not necessarily be perceived as delivered (by teachers) and stored (in books). In a similar vein, it is argued that by focusing on the mental models of individuals, one disregards the wider context of learning (Brown and Duguid, 1991). In this article, learning is approached as a social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in other words, it happens through other people (Gherardi et al., 1998).

If learning is not about increasing the level of organization through individual's cognitive structures, then it must not be perceived as a process of reduction and introducing order. Acknowledging the insight that power and knowledge mutually constitute each other and are constitutive of the established order (Foucault, 1969/1972), some degree of transformation of this order may be entailed by learning processes (Clegg et al., 2005), even if no particular shape or distribution of knowledge and power must be associated with learning. If learning occurs in the web of social interactions, which reconstitutes and changes established rules and ways of world-making (Clegg et al., 2005), managing it is associated with enabling heterogeneity to occur by providing room for multiple voices (Rhodes, 1997; Wenger, 2000). Thus, heterogenic processes enabled by decentralized organizational power may be perceived as a precondition for organizational learning to take place (Blackler and McDonald, 2000; Fox, 2000; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). According to this radical perspective (Clegg et al., 2005), learning is actualized by the relaxation of established frameworks that enables for heightened variety and complexity – in this sense, disorder becomes conducive to learning (Clegg et al., 2005). However, it is the continuing connection between order and disorder (Weick and Westley, 1996), the ability to de-frame and re-frame (Westenholz, 1993), to allow knowledge to oscillate between the solidified and the liquid that makes learning possible. If taken-for-granted remains unquestioned and new insights do not appear, the established 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 1989) will not be destabilized (Clegg et al., 2005) and learning will not happen. If this dynamic account of organizational becoming is emphasized (Clegg et al., 2005), 'organizing' rather than 'organization' becomes a unit of inquiry (Czarniawska, 2008). Thus, learning a concept will entail both its tentative creation and mutation: the 'move' (Steyaert and Janssens, 1999) and its 'betwixt and between' (Van Gennep, 1909/2004) liminal status (Turner, 1969). In other words, learning happens in the un-decidable moment, after the 'old one' is lifted and before the 'new one'

is established – it happens through the acknowledgment of deferral of meaning through an endless chain of signifiers: it happens through a *diffé- rance* (Derrida, 1981).

This approach to radical learning is informed by Giroux's (1997) radical pedagogy but is not synonymous with it. They are similar as long as the relaxation of established frameworks leading to attitude of openness is promoted, the consciousness of freedom is sought to develop and economic efficiency as a guiding principle of learning is rejected. The radical capacity of the notion of learning employed in my study is hinged upon its emergent negativity – the ultimate openness and sheer possibility enabled by the relaxation of inflexible patterns of sensemaking. Unlike as in Giroux (1983, 1988), it is therefore not oriented towards the specified goal associated with radical sociopolitical content, but instead should be construed in non-essentialist (and yet critical) ontologically 'weak' terms with their central role of transience and emergence (Chia, 1995).

In this perspective, 'a framework' for learning must remain a dubious idea. A way to tackle the question of possibility of learning, which is more in line with the emergent perspective on organization and organizing pursued in this study (also Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Clegg et al., 2005), is to reverse it: not whether we can 'create' the opportunity for learning, but how can we know whether learning is possible in a given context. This article suggests that one way of searching for the answer to the latter is scrutinizing conceptualizations actualized by different organizational discourses – their 'taken-for-grantedness' and the stabilization of final vocabularies that they employ. The 'moving' of a concept (Steyaert and Janssens, 1999) can only occur if room is provided. This article shall argue that the imagination and fantasy inherent in organizational spaces give an opportunity to oscillate, and thus to learn.

Gabriel's (1995) concept of 'the unmanaged organization' is an attempt to problematize this aspect of organizational life as a space in which people's emotions and anxieties contribute to irrationality expressed through stories, myths, gossip and so on. This fantasy terrain is an organizational dreamworld that exists simultaneously with goal orientation and rationalist approach of most organizations (Gabriel, 1995). The unmanaged space can be considered a suitable terrain for creative and unharnessed subjective thinking processes, which contribute to the generation of original and novel ideas in modern organizations (such interpretation is suggested by Gabriel's (1995) characterization of unmanaged organization as 'the habitat of subjectivity' (p. 477)). The terrain of unmanaged organization consists of uncolonized, irrational and uncontrolled space in which 'unsupervised, spontaneous activity' can blossom (Gabriel, 1995: 478).

This study will attempt to show that these unmanaged spaces, which may be perceived as a major organizational resource for dealing with the restrictions imposed by more regulated frameworks, and by implication as preconditions for learning to occur, are difficult to find. However, if learning originates in a liminal space in which the un-decidability of meaning enables 'moving' of the concept, it may be assumed that such a 'move' will leave its conceptual trace. In other words, the manner in which the concept functions in a particular language game will entail some information regarding the rules of the game and assumptions shared by the players. Hence, it is proposed that the conceptual analysis can be informative regarding the possibility of radical learning in a given sensemaking framework.

While Gabriel's (1995) attention was drawn to the different manners in which subjectivity is constructed by using narratives created in the unmanaged space, this study shall argue that the

latter is well placed to introduce flexible interpretations and, as a result, relax these constrictions that were imposed by strictly instrumental rules. The constructivist assumptions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) suggest that knowledge is not neutral (Mannheim, 1936) and that different interests vested in various social frameworks are constitutive to different types and objects of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2011). In this vein, Habermas (1971) proposes that different interests entail three divergent kinds of rationality: instrumental, hermeneutic and emancipatory. Thus, knowledge and its definitions serve the interests of a particular community (Habermas, 1971). Technical interests serve the ideological function of prediction and control and are expressed in terms of the instrumental rationality, which enforces and perpetuates the status quo thus enabling to empower the empowered and exclude the disempowered from the deal. Hence, instrumental rationality sustains the laws and rules of positivist science. However, practical interests seek the clarification and understanding of reality. Therefore, interpretive methods are employed within the realm of hermeneutic rationality to qualitatively explore the dynamics of the social by accentuating the processual and interactive approaches. Finally, emancipation and freedom are the crux of emancipatory interests and rationality. In this case, exposing the operation of the mechanisms of power and revealing the manners in which the social sphere is managed, lead to the existential realization of individual freedom (Habermas, 1979) and the dissolution of determinants of unfree behaviour such as dogmatism, compulsion and domination (Habermas, 1973).

Positioning this research in Habermasian terms suggests that neither control-oriented instrumental nor the socially entangled hermeneutic rationalities enable to search for the liminal organizational context in which learning occurs. The quest for the 'unmanaged', which would not be prone to be managed and therefore politicized (Izak, 2012), is hinged upon emancipatory rationality with its ceaseless drive to overcome positivist accounts. It must be noted, however, that this study recognizes the problematic aspects of the emancipatory mode in Habermasian (1973) writings, and especially its explicit Marxist and Freudist connotations, which burden it with solving problems in a very specific social and psychological context. This article, however, abstains from adjusting the social dynamics to any pre-established reality and considers the above framework merely because of its pluralist approach in which different forms of knowledge emerge from different core interests. Emancipatory rationality enables to account for the dynamic liminal processes of meaning-making because it strives to grasp the world in all its complexity.

It needs to be stressed that in Habermasian framework both technical and practical interests, and the resulting instrumental and hermeneutic modes of rationality (specific for natural and social sciences, respectively) alike, tend to ignore the role of human interests in constituting the areas and objects of inquiry. Therefore, the central hermeneutic category of understanding is considered here in terms of 'interpretive competency' prone to populate the social sphere with positivist notions. For Habermas, the principal difference between instrumental and hermeneutic modes seems to refer to objects rather than types of sensemaking process, hence both to some extent are construed as perpetuating the status quo. Taking into consideration that his main preoccupation (apart from laying foundations for the critical theory) is with delineating the emancipatory area (which, unlike the other two, would take constructivism into account and seek to bypass the positivist claims), for the purposes of this study, instrumental and hermeneutic rationality may be approached jointly from the emancipation-hindering perspective.

Naturally, idealizing and strictly isolating such frameworks is a purely academic exercise – one of them can only dominate, never eradicate the others. Emancipatory oriented sensemaking is an ideal type, but nevertheless, it enables to theorize the dynamics of conceptualizing notions and ideas important for the particular mode of management of meaning. This study will scrutinize the instrumentally rational conceptualizations of ‘wisdom’, ‘luck’ and ‘spirituality’, and shall propose their emancipatory readings in order to delineate the possibility for radical learning.

Admittedly, it is foolish to explore such a context. More than that, I would like to posit that the context itself is foolish in the sense given to it by James March (1976).¹ Attempting to delineate the specificity of the ‘foolish’ organizational mode of conceptualization driven by ‘the unmanaged’ conceptual space, the pivotal notions, namely, ‘luck’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘spirituality’, seem to provide excellent reference points, since not only their role and meaning are constructed differently by different rationalities and (recently often evoked) organizational discourses that employ them, but also the means of construction enable to reflect on learning in these frameworks. Spirituality, luck and wisdom – a conceptual analysis across functionalist rationalities As will be demonstrated, the predominant framework in which such notions as luck, wisdom and spirituality appear in the instrumental mode is the context of management. Naturally, the very notion of ‘management’ must not be approached in a functionalist manner. In his recent work, Magala (2009) indicates that the drive to ‘define’ management, which assumes the passivity of the receivers, is only one (and very limiting) approach to the management of meaning. Interpreting management through action is a way forward and negotiating its meaning by the actors involved is another distinguishable approach to it. In this post-modern pattern of sensemaking, the focus is on re-interpreting and re-negotiating the meanings appearing in the interactive organizational realities that surround us (Magala, 2009). This study may be seen as an attempt to further explore the potentiality of such processual and post-modern approach to management. However, as long as the functionalist approach dominates, in no way the project of attempting to immobilize the signifiers, to define and to objectify, is undermined. A critical take on the notion of management is certainly possible (Alvesson and Willmott, 2011; Grey and Willmott, 2005), but it is through analysing the functionalist approaches that this study unfolds into suggesting the ways to identify and potentially denaturalize them.

Luck

It must be observed that the instrumental rationality assumes both an emphasis on the means–ends efficiency attained through a series of actions leading to predetermined goals (Fayol, 1916/1949; Taylor, 1911), and an imposition of rules and regulations (Hage, 1965; Weber, 1947). In instrumentally rational discourse, the notion of ‘luck’ is typically constructed as a thing that can, and should, be manipulated with a view to achieve a specified result. The rationalist and functionalist approach of market-oriented organizations leaves very little space for luck construed as an uncontrollable and spontaneously appearing element (dictionary definition indicates that ‘luck’ means a success or, less typically, a failure, ‘brought by chance’ (Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 17 May 2012)). Those who consider luck as a factor of success – count on luck – may be perceived as passive and unrealistic (Cook, 2005). In this discourse, luck should not be restively expected, it should be embraced, or better, created – luck can be managed (Hanssen and Collins, 2011). In fact, for many modern authors, the prospect of ‘creating luck’ appears almost trivial.² The recipe for making your own luck seems to include talking to strangers, initiating small talk, dropping names,

eavesdropping, straying from chosen paths, offering or asking for help, exiting graciously without burning bridges and, last but not least, saying yes when you want to say no (RoAne, 2004).

Naturally, the notion of luck, which can be created, is rather specific. First, the accidental element is removed from it – luck no longer just happens. Second, as explicitly said by one of the authors (RoAne, 2004), in this new reformulation of luck, there are no lucky people in the traditional sense – Lucky-Lukes are the labourers of luck, onerous makers of their ‘lucky life’. Even the briefest review of psychological counselling literature, often with a managerial twist to it, suggests that the conviction that luck can be created is widespread (Burke, 2004). Luck becomes a device of organizational agency: it can be acquired, managed and exploited – through luck, goals are achieved. Parnell et al. (2012) propose that ‘luck’ should be studied more rigorously with a view to help managers to better understand and positively affect current performance levels. ‘Luck’ may also be perceived as an important factor in determining the salary levels of senior managers, and its relation to bonus payments is recognized (Van Den Brandt, 2011). Despite some claims to the contrary (Cook, 2005), luck is often construed in mainstream management literature as yet another commodity that can be managed in order to enhance productivity and performance. In this respect, luck becomes yet another characteristic of a ‘good employee’.

Spirituality

The drive to manage the human body and control the unmanaged space of human interactions and human psyche was inscribed in the managerial agenda at its inception, both from the reflective and analytical perspective (e.g. Foucault, 1963/1973, 1969/1972), as well as prominent in the positivist scholarship of the post-war era (Young, 1964). The indebtedness of Western capitalist discourses to economic powers mobilized in non-economic arena was indicated by Weber (1930) early enough to facilitate the reflection of humanistic psychologists on the overtly functionalist and rationalist frameworks of contemporary organizations from the 1960 onwards (e.g. Fromm, 1976; Maslow, 1962, 1971). However, not until early 1990s was this reflection elevated to the focal point of vast (and expanding) body of literature dealing with the self and the soul of the employee in the workplace (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). In the early 1990s, holism, transcendence, spirit, interrelatedness of the whole world and other previously omitted themes became important subjects in the new organizational literature with a spiritual focus (Biberman, 2003). Admittedly, spirituality can mean very different things to different people (Biberman, 2003), and it is obvious that there is no universally accepted definition of spirituality (King, 2007). However, it seems that by scrutinizing the discourse of organizational spirituality (OS), one can approximate a model of the notion of spirituality in it (as argued in: Izak, 2009). Therefore, this study assumes the position delineated elsewhere (Izak, 2012), and refers to the term ‘spirituality’ as encompassing the combined referents of notions such as dynamism, purposefulness, ethics, transcendence, striving for self-perfection, interconnectedness, mystery and belief in higher power in a non-religious way. Ostensibly, OS in many respects is the explosion of the unmanaged – no longer must intimate topics such as soul, god or meaning of life be discussed exclusively in the recess of sanctuaries or intimate conversations. On the contrary, they are welcomed in a growing number of workplaces (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2003). In this emerging discourse, the terrain of the rational, managed and strictly controlled is allegedly reduced to a minimum. The transcendence of materiality and interconnectedness between different objects, processes, states of mind and human beings substitute predictability and rationality (Izak, 2009). Positivist, rationalist approach is not so much

complemented with, as rather substituted by the unmanaged. In OS, the unmanaged is the name of the game and the ultimate source of justification of all initiatives and actions. However, whether this ostensible interest in the unmanaged spaces meant diverting attention from managing is altogether a different story. Spirituality is often treated instrumentally in different organizational frameworks. It is claimed that spirituality helps organizations to grow faster, achieve higher levels of production (Eisler and Montuori, 2003), to achieve higher returns on investments, to achieve higher employee retention rate (Garcia-Zamor, 2003) and to outperform non-spiritual organizations (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Konz and Ryan, 1999). According to Lloyd (1990), research has revealed that organizations high in workplace spirituality outperform those without it by 86%. Spiritual organizations are also said to have much more creative employees (Eisler and Montuori, 2003; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Gull and Doh, 2004; Konz and Ryan, 1999). Apparently, they find it easier to attract them and to ensure their long-term commitment (Garcia-Zamor, 2003), as well as higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism (Rego and Cunha, 2008). It is said that spirituality helps to improve introspection, communication (Harter and Buzzanell, 2007) and effectiveness (Pawar, 2008). Therefore, it seems, spirituality is often construed in an overtly functionalist context.

Wisdom

More often than not, wisdom is perceived in essentialist terms – for instance, knowledge (Staudinger and Baltes, 2000), intelligence (Sternberg, 1985), experience and age (Glück et al., 2005) are commonly treated as its approximations. Despite different formulations, discussing wisdom in instrumental terms typically involves an exhortation that it can be used to attain a certain purpose. Wisdom is sometimes discussed in the context of ‘development’, the progress towards wisdom being construed as detectable (Biloslavo and McKenna, 2011) as well as oriented towards a goal – people who became wiser are also more aesthetic and articulate. Wisdom can be also perceived as a desired employee characteristic and an important aspect of corporate training leading to ‘quantifiably affecting the bottom line profitability of a company’ (Awakened Wisdom Experiences: Corporate Training and Leadership Programs, accessed 1 September 2012).

Wisdom is sought after in leadership research (Mumford, 2011) and perceived as potentially enacted throughout the organization (Rooney et al., 2010). Pasupathi and Staudinger (2001) measure the correlation between wisdom-related performance and moral reasoning performance, Leonard and Swap (2006) promote the transfer of enduring business wisdom and Kaye et al. (2011) study the practical application of wisdom in talent management. As Izak’s (2013) analysis suggests, it also may be argued that the drive to operationalize the concept of wisdom is to some extent welcomed in the academia. One of the popular frameworks – Berlin Wisdom Paradigm – defines it as an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life (Staudinger and Baltes, 2000). In this approach, wisdom is construed as a metaheuristic that organizes and orchestrates knowledge towards human excellence (Staudinger and Baltes, 2000). Therefore, wisdom is perceived as ‘something’ desirable, and to be aspired for. Wisdom appears to involve a relatively well-defined set of attributes; notwithstanding the framework in which wisdom is studied (e.g. rationalist or spiritual), its formulations are essentialist despite ascribing wisdom with nearly opposite contents (Izak, 2013). Remarkably, what is construed as wisdom in the spiritual discourse is often perceived as its near opposite in straightforwardly rationalist-oriented approaches (Izak, 2013). For instance, such qualities as omnipotence and omniscience are not only compatible but often constitutive to a spiritual notion of wisdom, while simultaneously, they are at odds with rationalist theories

(Sternberg, 2004). Instrumentally, rational mode attempts to manage meanings and concepts that social actors create. In that respect, there seems to be no difference with regard to the employment of 'mainstream' rationalist or fringe spiritual vocabularies, since both endow their inherent concepts with 'despotic signifiers' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) relating them to some kind of essence. Spiritual, no less than rationalist, manner of employment and usage of concepts suggest that the space for oscillation in instrumental mode of rationality is extremely limited. The notions of 'luck', 'spirituality' and 'wisdom', despite being non-technical and potentially subjectivist, are approached from an essentialist perspective and not allowed to 'travel'. Whether organizational framework is objective and rational or becomes 'a habitat for subjectivity' (Gabriel, 1995), it may not necessarily consist in uncolonized and uncontrolled space conducive to creative and spontaneous activity. Instrumental rationality in all its shades may be equally effective in shaping, deforming and proscribing meanings: 'luck', 'serendipity' and 'wisdom' become casualties of these operations.³ However, 'the unmanaged' must not be construed as yet another unfulfilled promise of organization theory. The search for a terrain suitable for organizational learning leads through an inventive and capricious route (Clegg et al., 2005), where concepts can 'move', employed vocabularies are not finalized and conceptual spaces enable oscillating between signifiers. The liminal status of the unmanaged is inherent in its emergent quality – sensemaking processes, which enable meanings to remain unfixed. Hence, this article posits that emancipatory approach spawned by radical and freedom-oriented interests may provide an initial piece of the puzzle reflecting space for radical learning. The emancipatory mode – the bedrock of wise foolishness and radical learning The following section explores the possibility of departing from the instrumental framework towards the one informed by the drive to relax the functionalist notions and employ emancipatory mode of sensemaking in which communication between ostensibly incommensurate objects is possible and in which oxymoron can be embraced. Such a potentiality may be enabled by considering the logic of disorder (Warglien and Masuch, 1995) in which the unpredictable element does not render organizational reality either irrational or incoherent. An example of such a logic is the often evoked (e.g. Ashworth and Louie, 2002; Takahashi, 1997) garbage can type of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) – a conceptualization of organizational anarchy. Another one, March's (1976) technology of foolishness, although less acclaimed, seems to carry a message sufficiently relevant for those who would welcome a relaxation of organizational sensemaking frameworks to justify considering it a suitable candidate for the facilitator of learning in 'the unmanaged'.

The concept of technology of foolishness fully embraces the suggestion (made by Albin and Foley, 1998, among others) that an alternative to the straightforward rationalist approach should at least be considered, and introduces a perspective in which approaches and behaviours typically considered as 'foolish' may become a solution due to their capacity to surpass the limits imposed by the rationalist model of thinking (March, 1976). While the technology of foolishness is devised to supplement, not replace, the latter, March (1976) nevertheless remains sceptical towards the predictability of future circumstances, and consequently doubts whether current predictions may help to achieve goals if fully rational action is implemented. Along with future circumstances, future preferences remain ambiguous (March, 1978); therefore, it is argued that one of the key current advantages of successful organizations is the ability to do things for which they have no good reason, and to favour acting, not thinking (March, 1976). Among the prerequisites of this technology of foolishness are (1) inventing a strategy for suspending rational imperatives towards consistency and (2) inventing a way of thinking of a current action as occurring in terms of future values different

from the ones held at present (March, 1997). March recognizes that undertaking actions that appear to be insufficiently justified may be a difficult strategy to develop on a wider scale; therefore, a set of facilitating instructions is introduced. These include trusting one's intuition, treating goals as mere hypotheses, being cautious towards one's memory, perceiving inconsistency between expressed values and behaviours (hypocrisy) as a transitory state and treating experience as a theory in order to enable experimenting with alternative histories and interpretations (March, 1997). March emphasizes that since rationalist calculation may be misleading and ineffective, it is playfulness that should assist intelligent decision-making. For that reason, skills and attitudes of inconsistency should be given preference and encouraged in organization. This playful foolishness should interact with rationality and in some situations temporarily relieve organization from strict coordination and pursuit of control (March, 1997).

The foolish organizing is a blame-free approach, which encourages innovation and risk taking (Clegg et al., 2002), promotes openness towards original ideas which may appear strange at the time (Sutton, 2001), enhances organization's propensity to challenge its own assumptions (Mendonça et al., 2008) and, according to some accounts, potentially liberates the organization from the stifling, 'predictable legacy' of organization theory (Plowman et al., 2007).

According to this perspective, the unmanaged terrain is not a characteristic of a specific type of organization or some particular sector of activity. It is inherent in the very nature of human thinking in which rational processes are typically accompanied by an irrational component. If, in line with the previous argumentation, learning may occur if oscillation between the two is enabled (Clegg et al., 2005), organizational emancipated 'unmanaged spaces' appear to be naturally conducive to learning in organizations.

The 'unmanaged' spaces may not necessarily be enabled by consciously constructed 'playful' and 'fun'-oriented organizational contexts,⁴ since play may easily become a managerial strategy of appropriation leading to intensely managed organizational realities (Costea et al., 2007). Neither must the 'unmanaged' be linked to the Google-type 'gamification' strategies – using the games' mechanics and rationale to inform organizational processes to render them more playful (McGonigal, 2011; Reeves and Read, 2009). Here, the unmanaged is perceived through the lens of relaxation of organizational sensemaking, not as the result of a consciously developed strategy but rather as an emergent quality. The learning happens when organizational actors dare to act 'foolishly' in this unmanaged space thus defying established vocabularies, enabling concepts to oscillate and arrive at new meanings. In other words, the technology of foolishness may facilitate learning in 'the unmanaged' organizational space.

Such conclusion appears no less valid in the context of a market-oriented organization than in such exemplary instances of hard rationalism as advancements in natural science. Instances of 'foolishness' in the scientific process can be easily identified. Scientific and technological development is very far from straightforward consistency (Collins and Pinch, 1998). Some among breakthrough scientific discoveries as well as small-scale technological achievements explicitly share this 'foolishly' playful pattern in which meanings are allowed to oscillate and their closure is not sought after. The instances of dissolution of dogmatic sensemaking patterns via enabling the radical openness and relaxation of meaning-making rules abound and include such serendipitous discoveries as Velcro, Teflon and penicillin (Roberts, 1989). The cases evoked below might not foster

the commonsensical objectivist view on science but seem to epitomize the traits of emergent and unrestrained foolishness inherent in the scientific process combining elements of luck with inclusive intersubjective processes through which meanings are constructed.⁵

Relativity

Einstein's general theory of relativity was first published in 1916 in *Annalen der Physik* and instantly aroused unusual interest and controversy in the world of science. Einstein maintained that the geometry of time and space is influenced by the distribution of matter – a finding that went counter to many established predictions (Einstein, 1916). In order to find evidence that this theory was correct, one needed to find a way to prove that the gravitational field has a measurable effect on light. The problem was that Newton's theory, which was deemed binding at that time, predicted a similar effect, only smaller. The crucial question then was not whether light bends in the presence of a massive object but how big the bent is. An experiment was devised by the British astrophysicist Arthur Eddington to settle this issue once and for all. Huge problems encountered by Eddington and his associates during the experiment made its results highly debatable. Calculations based on such data were inconclusive.

Some pictures showed results leaning towards General Relativity, while the rest supported Newton's theory. The material was so poor that Eddington introduced a certain (rather doubtful) assumption interpreting his data (regarding the gravitational effect) and only then did they come close to Einstein's predictions. Even according to scientific standards at the time, these results did not give a clear support to either theory. However, in 1919, the Astronomer Royal officially announced that Eddington's experiment confirmed Einstein's General Relativity. According to Collins and Pinch (1998), the main reason for this announcement was that the actual process of confirmation had nothing to do with straightforward empirical test followed by logical deduction. It was a result of the changed perception of the world, which took effect even before the experiment was made. Scientists felt that Einstein's theory was correct; therefore, they threw out discrepancies and ignored certain data. This intuitive decision proved to be right – innumerable experiments conducted since confirmed predictions of General Relativity.

Heliocentrism

The Ptolemaic geocentric model of the Universe, strongly founded on Aristotelian ideas, remained a paradigmatic cosmological concept until the 16th century, when the theories of Copernicus contributed to its repeal. However, the introduction of the heliocentric model by Copernicus appears to be to some extent motivated by his non-scientific philosophical convictions, such as the sun-centred philosophy of Hermetism (Yates, 1979) as well as Neo-Platonism (Kuhn, 1970). In addition, he was not able to provide an undisputable proof for his theory since, at that time, astronomical calculations of a planet's position based on heliocentric concepts were actually less accurate than those which included the geocentric model. Copernicus' argumentation, apart from mathematical equations, was largely based on aesthetic claims to what would constitute a more complete model of the universe. It was not until the 17th century, when scientific authority of Galileo and Johannes Kepler assisted by relatively accurate astronomical instruments could provide support for the heliocentric system based on more credible evidence. These increasingly rigorous observations culminated at the end of the 18th century in William Hershell's measurements, which finally determined the fate of the Ptolemaic model demonstrating the correctness of heliocentrism.

Post-it

These non-rational and intuitive processes are naturally not limited to major scientific discoveries but are often present in small-scale technical innovations. Such is the story of innovation that led to the creation of one of the most common office accessories – the Post-it note. As we shall see, ‘the gut-feeling’ and fortune played their roles at all stages of the process. First, a scientist working for 3M tried to experiment with one of the monomers to see what would happen if he put a lot of it into the mixture (Nayak and Ketteringham, 1994). There were no scientific clues suggesting that this ‘playful activity’ could lead to any valuable findings (Nayak and Ketteringham, 1994). But it did. A new adhesive polymer was discovered, which had a peculiar property of being more cohesive than adhesive (it clung to its own molecules better than to other molecules). However, in 3M’s perspective, it meant that it was simply bad glue (Nayak and Ketteringham, 1994). Finding an application for this solution occurred to be difficult and only owing to a lucky coincidence and the inventor’s leap of faith (he felt that ‘it had to be good for something’) the adhesive polymer project was kept afloat. Eventually, it was saved by a sort of illumination experienced by a 3M chemist and a choir director: he realized that he would need that sort of glue to make bookmarks in his hymnal. These few accidental circumstances make for the beginning of a long and highly non-linear process, which led to the development of Post-its (Nayak and Ketteringham, 1994).

Discussion

Although the analogies between these processes should not be pushed too far, there seems to be a number of similarities in the approach to key notions. In each of them, ‘objective’ obstacles resulting from the scientific legacy were treated suspiciously. Neither the rigours of rationality nor the essentialist sensemaking processes were enforced. Reference to luck and serendipity as a descriptive device was spontaneous and unmanaged. Favourable effects were reached owing to the relaxation of, and yet in relationship with ‘hard’ scientific standards. The actors involved did not treat the concepts – even as embedded as ‘gravitation’, ‘evidence’ or for that matter, ‘glue’ – as exclusive possessions of predetermined scientific contexts. The unfreezing of the established conceptual frames was achieved and followed by an inclusive experimentation with different renderings. This process was not unlike a negotiation in which multiple parties have a stake in the final result but are also interested in a developed understanding. The conceptual closure was achieved through negotiating between different meanings, and may be only temporary. ‘Luck’ and ‘wisdom’ were conceptualized in relationship to both positivist and emancipatory frameworks. For all actors involved, such as scientists (Einstein, Copernicus and 3M chemists) and their followers (Eddington and 3M crew), the references of these concepts apparently were not straightforwardly essentialist. Spiritual convictions and religiously motivated pursuits were conflated with scientific approach, to inform the understandings in which ‘luck’ and ‘wisdom’ assumed the position between spiritual and scientific extremes. For instance, it was deemed ‘wise’ to facilitate ‘luck’, however, not by creating a framework for it, but by refraining from putting it into one. ‘Lucky’ discovery was considered an important stage in arriving at the solution for the polymer adhesive, but was neither planned, nor replicated and in fact was construed as driven by hunch. It was not ‘wise’ to pursue the heliocentric model by any essentialist standard of wisdom, and yet, conviction and hunch as well as the ‘foolish’ relaxation of scientific standards enabled within the unmanaged realm of fantasy resulted in a fortunate – in a non-essentialist sense – discovery, and eventually in a changed understanding of the

world. It seems therefore conceivable for this relaxed notional context for 'wisdom', 'spirituality' and 'luck' to be retraced owing to conceptual analysis.

If foolishness is a 'technology', a method of not adhering to the method, the unmanaged can be construed as the space uncolonized by instrumental (and 'hermeneutic' in Habermasian terms) rationalities, in which unmanaged 'foolishness' can thrive. Since the major force in the unmanaged terrain is a fantasy and its 'landmarks' include stories, jokes, gossip and myths (Gabriel, 1995), the changed perceptions of the world and ungrounded certainty that solutions currently without problems 'have to be good for something' are located in the unmanaged spaces. In the cases discussed previously, the emancipatory and unmanaged elements appeared on par with controlled and managed framework. The oscillation between different types of rationality was enabled owing to the inclusion of feelings, convictions, hunches and 'blossoming spontaneity', none of which exclusively belonged to either the instrumental or emancipatory register. It is in this liminal space where radical learning can happen. And where else could it happen? In spite of the wide ranging societal and scientific projects, including Cartesian rationality and Frankfurt School's criticality, social life defies neat categorizing into either exclusively instrumental or emancipatory frames.

Organizations and their participants create meanings, sensemaking processes and perceptions on knowledge and its objects, which are brokered by their vested interests. In order to render conveying new meanings possible, the emancipation from the particular framework for knowledge construction is coveted. However, for radical learning (in the meaning delineated at the beginning of this study) to occur, emancipation must be enabled continuously – there must be something to emancipate from. The sensemaking order in which only abstraction from the dominant framework is envisaged effectively hinders the possibility for such learning. Radical learning demands an oscillation between tentatively solidified poles of signifiers in order to enrich the meaning-making capacity of a given sensemaking framework. For instance, if the notion of 'luck' is enabled to travel between 'an entirely unexpected occurrence', 'a not really expected, but sought-after event occurring in the facilitated framework' and 'the pre-determined divine intervention' (as it is often construed in the spiritual context (Izak, 2012)), its constructed extension may become sufficiently inclusive to accommodate conceptualizations originating in disparate modes of sensemaking. As a result, the potentially agency-limiting inflexible adherence to the to pre-conceived conceptual frame (such as 'I'm not a lucky person, so it's not worth trying' or 'I've networked with the right people, so it must work out') may be mitigated or substituted by a broader one in which meanings are constantly negotiated: Whether I'm lucky or not depends on what am I looking for [a good or 'a bad' glue, for instance], do I dare to look outside of the box built from the current standards [such as the Newtonian model], or if I'm able to reassess success and failure in the light of future circumstances [e.g. in which case, more accurate measurements may become possible].

The precondition for this conceptual ambiguity creating the liminal context for radical learning is the emancipation from the stifling notions of established theories: foolishness is its driving force and unmanaged is its realm.

Because, as the perspective on learning delineated at the beginning indicates, learning happens rather than is produced. For it to appear, the relaxation of the pre-established meanings must be made possible, the un-decidable moment must be enabled and the finality of the vocabulary must be suspended. This 'un-decidable moment' facilitates the negotiation of meaning, which leads through oscillation between different rationalities, which may endow concepts with stabilized and

essentialist references – just as ‘spirituality’, ‘luck’ and ‘wisdom’ were anchored by instrumental and emancipatory frame. While this ‘foolish’ process itself does not happen in any framework, neither does it take place in a void. It is imbued by feelings, hunches and fantasy; potentially externalized as jokes, gossips or, simply, stories – the ‘unmanaged’ is its space. The relevant metaphor for such learning process is ‘travel’ rather than ‘accumulation’, and its end result ‘understanding’ rather than ‘knowing’.

Such a context may not be intuitive or easy to locate, and therefore, the question ‘Is learning possible in this conceptual space?’ is more fundamental than ‘How’ or ‘What’ should one learn. The latter can be asked once the former is explored. Admittedly, as the above examples may suggest, learning as the ‘foolish’ process happening in the unmanaged space may feasibly be associated with the context of discovery and innovation. However, naturally, such learning must not be limited to a fundamental or grand scale novelty. It can appear in every sufficiently inclusive social context and can refer to mundane issues. All that seems to be required is the capacity to refrain from precluding the innovative conceptualizing to appear. Crucially, since the unmanaged is a liminal space in which no particular point is privileged, the end result of such learning, in an important sense, will always be unique.

Conclusion

This article started with the exploration of the notion of radical learning, to some extent informed by Clegg et al.’s (2005) and Giroux’s (1997) concepts, and proposed that it may be actualized by the relaxation of established patterns of sensemaking, which enables for heightened variety, complexity and even disorder, to appear. Such learning is emergent and continuous – learning of a concept assumes grasping it through various vocabularies established by different rationalities in which it is conceptualized, and yet, it remains unfixed from a viewpoint of any given conceptual framework. Therefore, radical learning happens in the un-decidable moment, between frameworks, that is, it has a liminal status. However, for this conceptual oscillation to take place in organization, both the space unpopulated by stifling theoretical frameworks, and some kind of inclusive yet powerful driving force are necessary. This study posits that such a sensemaking framework may be provided by the ‘unmanaged’ spaces described by Gabriel (1995) and the technology of foolishness developed by March (1976), respectively. Scrutinizing the ways of conceptualizing the three notions (not straightforwardly technical, and yet recently often evoked in organizational contexts), namely, ‘luck’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘spirituality’ in functionalist frameworks (mainstream rationalist and fringe spiritual alike), enables retracing the manners of endowing them with essentialist content. These instrumentally (and hermeneutically in Habermasian typology) rational contexts, which are perceived in this study as those in which radical learning is hindered, are juxtaposed with the oscillatory one (employing emancipatory rationality at its outset), in which notional ambiguity is sought after and enabled. This ‘foolishlyunmanaged’ sensemaking is explored via instances of innovative thinking in organizational and broadly scientific contexts and the translation of one of the previously analysed concepts (‘luck’) into such context is discussed. As a result, the study delineates a conceptual and sensemaking space that may facilitate radical learning by enabling emancipation from established structures and allowing concepts to oscillate between different rationalities. Scrutinizing instances of radical learning, without attempting to develop the framework for it, constitute an avenue for further research.

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Notes

1. Therefore, it must be made clear that in this article, I am not taking a commonsensical approach to 'foolishness' as akin to negative constructs such as 'stupidity', and neither am I referring in this study to Alvesson and Spicer's (2012) 'functional' notion of stupidity, understood as an absence of reflexivity and a refusal to use one's intellectual capacities, although I find this path of reasoning potentially worth pursuing.
2. My strategy of juxtaposing popular psychology with serious academic reflection is a conscious choice: as my research suggests, the former informs organizational sensemaking processes just as strongly, if not stronger, than the latter. Meanings created in popular culture permeate organizations very easily.
3. Admittedly, to posit that the unmanaged is a liminal space betwixt and between rational and irrational is tantamount to broadening the concept developed by Gabriel (1995) or rather to re-deploying the concept's centre of gravity away from the irrational side. Such consequence must be welcomed if the conceptual 'movement' approach of this study is pursued. However, further consideration of this redeployment must be left for the future.
4. This proposition should in no way be read as fostering the 'soft capitalist' exhortation to the cultivation of one's 'authentic self', 'self-improvement', entitlement to 'self-realisation' and 'duty to be happy' (Bruckner, 2000, in Costea et al., 2005). Therefore, instead of promoting the 'carpe diem' hype of explicitly playful organizational design in which work becomes a site for the pursuit of collective and individual 'wellness' (McGillivray, 2005), in this study, foolishness is approached as (potentially sought after) aspect of organizational and individual sensemaking processes.
5. Naturally, renditions of the 'scientific discovery story' can be numerous, including essentialist and objectivist approaches in which one 'correct' version of the story is referred to. However, in line with a pluralist, post-modern approach to storytelling (Boje, 2001), the dominant narratives are not perceived as the only valid renditions, and multiple voices are enabled to be heard (Boje, 2008).

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